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TAGS: [IS KMDR GAZA DISENGAGEMENT MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)

SUBJECT: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION: WAKING UP TO REALITY IN GAZA:
RECENT MEDIA COMMENTARY ON DISENGAGEMENT PART 2

[11.](#) Summary: As the disengagement battle escalates on the ground, with violent confrontations in Gaza resulting in a temporary IDF closure of the Gush Katif settlement bloc, anti-disengagement roadblocks throughout the country, and the first case of a "conscientious objector," Israeli media commentary and analysis debates the success or lack thereof of the anti-disengagement activists' tactics, their ideological motivation as well as the Israeli government's preparedness to carry out the plan. Public support for disengagement, the reality of which seems to finally be seeping in, continues to decrease, though most polls still show a slight majority in favor, as the countdown to disengagement draws near. End Summary.

"The Opening Shot Of Disengagement"

[12.](#) Concern over escalating violence, especially since the actual evacuation is not slated to begin for over a month, is evidenced by the numerous commentaries on this issue. On June 30, military correspondent Amos Harel wrote on page one of independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "If anyone was still harboring doubts, along came Wednesday's day of battles throughout the country and laid them to rest: the disengagement has arrived.... The violence is coming from the pullout opponents, and it is dictating the nature of the confrontation. The IDF and police are gradually streamlining their responses to riots, but the events of recent days constitute a worrying prelude ahead of the real thing in August." Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote on page one of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot on July 1: "It took the army time to realize that the people sitting in the Maoz Hayam Hotel [in Gush Katif] had not come to show their opposition to disengagement. They had come to provoke the Palestinians, to create provocations and to push the Palestinians into responding with violence, to ignite the Gaza Strip, to involve the IDF in fighting masses of Palestinians, and to enforce their wish to halt disengagement....Disengagement is here."

[13.](#) Residents of Gush Katif, long-clinging to faith and routine in the face of imminent evacuation under Sharon's disengagement plan, were greeted with a sharp wake up call last week as Israeli Defense Forces, in an effort to prevent in influx of disengagement opponents to Gush Katif, imposed a 24-hour closure on the area. Nadav Shragai writes in Ha'aretz on July 8, "Many of the residents suddenly discovered that belief is one thing and reality another; that the evacuation is closer than they had imagined. In fact, that it is already here, more threatening and concrete than ever, and that their total belief was perhaps a bit blind."

[14.](#) On July 6, leading media (banners in Jerusalem Post and Hatzofe) reported that, in what it described as the "opening shot" of disengagement, the Yesha Council of Jewish Settlements in the Territories on Tuesday summoned its supporters to a three-day march on Gush Katif beginning on July 18 to "cancel the expulsion." It has been reported frequently in recent weeks that the government, fearing that many demonstrators will stay in the area to be evacuated, is considering closing the Gaza Strip to non-residents ahead of schedule and has already done so once. One June 23, Kseniya Svetlova (Arab affairs journalist, Channel Israel Plus) wrote in popular, pluralist Russian-language Novosty Nedely, "Everything that is going on now, including the unsuccessful Sharon-Abu Mazen meeting in Jerusalem, is ... a prelude to the explosion that would inevitably take place. ... Today, when only two months are left before the disengagement, it is obvious that we are speeding towards ... a very dangerous period of time, where we could get easily stuck..."

[15.](#) Delving beyond the protestors' tactical maneuvers, to examine their ideological motivation and the slow response from disengagement supporters, liberal op-ed writer Yael Paz-Melamed wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv on June 23: "The difference -- the ostensibly substantive difference -- between the rallying of the Right and the silence and apathetic reaction of the Left is

not an indicator of how strongly the Left is committed to its ideology. It is essentially an indicator of the ideology itself. The worldview of the moderate Left, to which many people in the center of the political spectrum also subscribe, is one of commitment to life, even at the cost of land and walls [such as the Western wall]. Life is the supreme value.[...]The right-wing camp, and particularly the extreme Right, believes that almost anything is permissible for the sake of the Land of Israel -- to break laws, to disrupt normal life, to deprive another people of liberties, to humiliate them, to crush them into the dust..." Nahum Barnea in Yediot Ahronot on June 27, explains why the blues (pro-disengagement supporters) are, to date, losing the recently dubbed war of the colors - over a million orange ribbons distributed compared to less than half a million blue. "The gap is not only logistic (difficulty in obtaining blue ribbons at low cost). It is real. According to polls, most Israelis support disengagement. But it is an indifferent, superficial support, with reservations, support from afar, without any emotional involvement. Opposition to disengagement is a completely different matter. It makes a statement. It is defiant. It has sex appeal."

"The Battle for Public Opinion"

16. Commenting on how the tactics adopted by disengagement opponents might be costing them the battle for public opinion, Deputy Editor-in-Chief Avi Bettelheim wrote on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv on June 30: "On Wednesday, as I watched the scenes from the blocked roads on television, I was more sure than ever that the entire [disengagement] was going to be all right, if only because the settlers are very close to making the rest of the public sick and tired of them -- and when that happens, their battle will become insignificant, and will be unable to change anything of the government's original plan for the evacuation of the Gaza Strip and northern Samaria [the northernmost part of the West Bank]...." Continuing in this trend, Buki Naeh writes in Yediot Ahronot on June 30, "I am no longer your friend. What you are doing is not ideology...In the name of your slogan, 'A Jew does not expel a Jew,' then a Jew also does not kill a Jew - even if he lives in Ramat Gan....I can't forgive you for the stone throwing yesterday in Gush Katif at the wounded Arab who was lying on the ground. You are not Jews. In my Jewish people there are no such individuals." Nadav Shragai adds in Ha'aretz on July 8, referring to the 24-hour closure of Gush Katif last week, "In the sphere of external influence, the publicity line of Gush Katif sustained a serious setback, perhaps a mortal one. If the parliamentary battle was lost by the opponents of disengagement back in March, it is definitely possible that the battle for public opinion was lost last week....The destruction was lightning fast. Regaining public support will take a great deal of time, which the anti-disengagement activists do not have."

17. Sharon's true motives are called into question by varied sources. On July 7, correspondent Dov Kontorer wrote in conservative, Russian-language Vesty: "The emergency atmosphere being spread in Israel is intended to make up for the decision regarding the deportation of Jews from Gaza and northern Samaria [the northern part of the West Bank], which obviously lacks legitimacy.... Ariel Sharon demands that an even tougher suppression of the growing resistance movement.... There is no place for dialog and civil harmony ... in Sharon's new scheme, which is totally oriented toward scaring the disengagement opponents. The latter, who made a conscious choice in favor of a non-violent opposition to the Israeli government's destructive plans, are facing...open repression and a biased coverage in the local and international press." Settler leader Israel Harel wrote in Ha'aretz on June 23: "Many of those who supported the disengagement yesterday are today voicing serious doubts as to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's true motives and the prices -- strategic, ideological and human -- that we are going to pay. With the terror continuing, coupled with threats that if Sharon is slow in implementing additional withdrawals, the terror of the past years will be just a preface to the true war of terror, it is natural for people to be changing their positions....."

18. Arabic language media, reflecting the opinion of the Arab citizens of Israel, have generally been in favor of the disengagement, though they also question the true motivation behind the plan. According to the June Peace Index poll, Ha'aretz reports on July 7, that among the Arab citizens of Israel, "the rate of support for disengagement is considerably higher than in the Jewish population - 74 percent in favor and 24 percent against." On June 24, columnist Ahmad Khatib wrote in far left leaning daily Arabic Language Al-Ittihad:".. The withdrawal from Gaza is not really a withdrawal but rather fleeing from a harsh and an expensive reality for the occupation.. Gaza consists of less than one and half percent of the historical Palestine and after more than half a century of sacrifices, I don't see any accomplishment or profit coming out of the occupation's desertion of only one and a half percent out of the 'sea to the river' project. We should be aware that historically the colonial occupation had economical motives behind their stay, and accordingly, Gaza has nothing to offer the occupation.."

"Political Refusal Is Nothing To Be Proud Of"

9. Uncertainty remains as to how many soldiers will refuse orders to carry out the evacuation, and what fate these refuseniks will meet. Discussion of the issue of these "conscientious objectors" has been extremely widespread in the media. The Israeli public got a hint of what might come as Avi Bieber became the first soldier to refuse a direct order to evacuate settler protestors from Gaza. The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized on June 28 on this topic: "Political refusal is nothing to be proud of, and both sides know it. Disengagement opponents who are now blithely urging refusal were the first to be appalled at left-wing calls to refuse to serve in the territories.... The refuser, more than advancing his own cause, is undermining the institutions on which we all depend for our lives, our security, and our existence.... Whether refusal comes from ideology or ignorance, our society must defend itself not only by punishing the perpetrators, but by maintaining the stigma against political refusal and bolstering democratic values through civic education. Defenders of democracy need as much courage, tenacity and creativity as those who, deliberately or through ignorance, would undermine what we must all hold most dear."

10. According to some opinion makers, the writing has been on the wall, as well as in the press, for quite some time. Yaron London writes in Yediot Ahronot on June 30, "The warning was written in this newspaper a few months ago: 'If a large number of religious soldiers heed their rabbis, who are inciting them to disobey orders, it will become apparent that those who made dire predictions about their behavior on the day a contradiction arises between the command of the state and the command of their teachers were right....The secular public, which appreciates the great contribution of the religious public to the defense forces, may reach the conclusion that it is worth waiving this contribution, since its harm outweighs its benefit.'"

11. Comment: As the countdown to disengagement progresses, the growing battle on the street is being reflected in media commentary and opinion. Disengagement opponents have ramped up efforts to prevent evacuation at all costs, which might be costing them the public's sympathy as demonstrations grow more violent. Though the public remains doubtful as to the government's preparedness for the logistics of evacuation - how to transport people and belongings, to where to transport them, what to do with what remains behind, etc, the voices of those that initially doubted the reality of disengagement are waning. The public appears to be slowly adjusting to the reality of disengagement, a messy, incomplete, perhaps violent and confrontational disengagement, but a disengagement nonetheless.
End comment.